

range from 5% to a staggering 35%, but it is unclear which student groups are most vulnerable and why they use these stimulants. As students' health behavior cannot be understood in isolation from the social context in which they study, medical students might be more at risk for NMUSM because of high levels of competition and related stress. The goal of this research was thus twofold: (1) Does competition lead to higher stress levels and greater likelihood of NMUSM? and (2) Do these interrelationships differ depending on the preferred post-graduate training (GP vs specialist vs 'do not know')?

#### Methods

In total, 3,159 Flemish medical students (48.74% response rate) participated anonymously in a questionnaire on stimulant use. NMUSM was defined as either use without a prescription or use with a prescription, but not as part of a treatment. We performed (multiple group) structural equation modeling (SEM) to answer the two research questions.

#### Results

Preliminary results show significant associations between competition, stress and NMUSM: the higher the perception of medical school as being competitive, the higher the stress levels ( $p < 0.001$ ) and the more likely the NMUSM ( $p < 0.001$ ). The association between competition and stress was significantly stronger among students who aspire a GP training compared to students who aspire a specialist training ( $\chi^2(1) = 6.459$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

#### Conclusions

The competitive climate in medical school creates high stress levels, making students more vulnerable for NMUSM. They need to be educated about how to cope with stress in a non-pharmaceutical way, making them more resilient to stress during studentship as well as in their future careers.

#### Key messages:

- Fierce competition and stress cause medical students to misuse stimulant medication. Because of related health risks and their future role as medication gatekeeper, this misuse is highly problematic.
- Students need to be educated about how to cope with stress in a non-pharmaceutical way, making them more resilient to stress during studentship as well as in their future careers.

### Popping pills in medical school: Are competition and stress causing students to misuse stimulants?

Sara De Bruyn

S De Bruyn<sup>1</sup>, E Wouters<sup>1</sup>, K Ponnet<sup>1</sup>, G Van Hal<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Sociology, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

<sup>2</sup>Department of Epidemiology and Social Medicine, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

Contact: sara.debruyn@uantwerpen.be

#### Background

The university experience is a time of transition and experimentation, especially with regard to substance misuse. However, there is still a dearth of scientific knowledge with respect to the non-medical use of stimulant medication (NMUSM). Percentages of students reporting NMUSM